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SUBJECT: BAS-CONGO UPDATE: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ESTABLISHES
COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

REF: KINSHASA 200 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. Summary. The DRC National Assembly agreed February 23 to establish a special committee to investigate the January 31-February 1 violence in Bas-Congo province. Interior Minister Denis Kalume and Defense Minister Tharcisse Habarugira addressed the Assembly regarding the incidents and responded to questions from deputies. Deputy Ne Muanda Nsemi, leader of the ethnic Kongo separatist group BDK, rejected the government's version of events. End summary.

¶2. (U) The DRC National Assembly voted February 23 to establish a special committee to investigate violence between security forces and demonstrators in Bas-Congo province January 31 and February 1 which resulted in a large number of deaths (reftels). The 15-member committee will be chaired by the Assembly's deputy rapporteur (spokesman) Egide Ngwokoso and include seven additional members from the majority AMP coalition as well as seven others drawn from opposition deputies; all provinces will be represented. It is scheduled to complete its investigation in 10 days.

¶3. (U) The decision followed an appearance before the assembled deputies by transitional ministers Denis Kalume (PPRD) and Tharcisse Habarugira (RCD). Assembly President Vital Kamerhe (PPRD) had agreed to convene the session in response to calls by Bas-Congo and opposition deputies led by Alphonse Kembukuswa (MDD) and Gilbert Kiakwama kia Kiziki (CDC). Interior Minister Kalume, whose ministry is responsible for the police, was the focus of most of the debate.

¶4. (U) Kalume said that 76 civilians and 10 security personnel died in the violence, which he claimed was planned in advance in Kinshasa. He said members of the separatist Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) sect beheaded one officer and killed others with machetes and clubs; he showed photos of the dead officers' mutilated bodies. He acknowledged that police fired directly at crowds of BDK adherents, but only in self-defense. "If the attacker continues to advance after three warning shots, the police have to shoot the target," he said.

¶5. (U) Kembukuswa, who was elected from BDK leader Ne Muanda Nsemi's home town of Songolo, called on Kalume to resign. Kalume responded that since he was at the time of the incidents a member of the transitional government that would come to an end the following day with the installation of the Gizenga government (septel), he had already effectively resigned. (Note: He is also the only member of the old cabinet to retain the same position in the new. End note.)

¶6. (SBU) Defense Minister Habarugira addressed the Assembly for approximately five minutes. "Because my colleague has said it all," he said, "I don't have much to say about what happened in Bas-Congo." None of the deputies raised the issue of deadly force used by Congolese military forces called in to restore peace in the coastal port of Muanda, which saw over 30 deaths.

¶7. (U) Nsemi later dismissed Kalume's presentation, calling it a "montage" that proved nothing. He called the killings of civilians a violation of human rights and said he had documents that contradicted Kalume's version, which he would release at the appropriate time.

¶7. (SBU) Comment. The committee's investigation will be conducted in the interim period before the Assembly resumes work on March 15. Establishing the committee was part of a package agreed upon earlier with opposition deputies that enabled Kamerhe to minimize the short-term political impact of the Bas-Congo incidents on his leadership and to close out the Assembly's 30-day special session in time for the installation of the new government. End comment.

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